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Topic: The Meaning of Freedom

The Meaning of Freedom

No one had ever seen Salma before her 17th birthday party, except for her parents, younger siblings and her maids. “Why?” you might ask. The answer lies with her father, an independent man with an ambition that could beat that of a president's. Her father was a businessman, who was very well known throughout the country because of his richness and extravagant life. Her mother was a gentle and affectionate woman – a trait which was nurtured from when she was a child. She was a soft-spoken woman and, what is more remarkable, she had a good constitution. She had two sons after Salma was born, whom she loved dearly. Having two younger brothers brightened Salma's life as she was always gloomy at home out of sadness and boredom. Her childhood wasn't similar to others' her age – she was groomed from the tender age of 4 years old to become a proper lady suited to marry an elite man.

Life was never kind to her; sure, she was born into a rich household, but life is much more than that. Life is about exploring the world, meeting new people, relishing the nature, and living it to the fullest. She wanted to have an adventure of her own – she had always been dreaming to become a heroine in her own story – but so far, the bravest act that she had done was trying to sneak out of the house. Obviously, it did not go well because she was caught red-handed before she could even reach for the doorknob. The incident was still fresh in her mind, although it had happened for a quite some time.

It was a sunny day and the sun was shining brightly. The birds were chirping outside the balcony of her room and she could hear the joyful laughter of her two younger brothers in the garden. She walked to the veranda, eager to know what they were doing in the garden. It seemed like they were playing a game of run and chase by themselves. “Oh, how lucky they are. I wish I was down there with them,” she uttered to herself.

With the little courage that she had, she crept down the stairs and, after making sure there were no maids around, she dashed towards the door that was situated at the end of the hall. She was at the end of the hall and was reaching for the doorknob eagerly, but a sudden grip to her wrist jolted her. She stood there frozen. She was gripping in fear, thinking it was her father as she turned her head to look at the person who took her by surprise. Her body was shaken. As her vision cleared she could see that the person was her father's loyal butler. He had a stern look on his face, and she was always afraid to look directly at him. Her mind was racing madly trying to figure out what to do next. She was speechless without doubt. She didn't realise she was holding her breath until the butler had vanished from her vision. Since that day, she never attempted to go out again.

As the days passed by, her uneasiness grew heavier; she had sleepless nights and she would often find herself dozing off during the day. Her mother tried her best to make Salma understand her responsibility as a daughter. Her mother reassured her that everything would be alright. Although she didn't quite agree with her mother's words that a daughter should do

anything to please her family, she was thankful that her mother was always there beside her to give her comfort. Salma hugged her mother for her warm consolation. Her mother's words had made her calm in a way that she couldn't quite explain – it was a feeling of love and warmth.

Soon, the day that she dreaded finally came. She wanted to persuade her father to put off her meeting with the eligible suitors in the country, but she knew nothing would dissolve her father's plan. Standing from the veranda, she could see the guests streaming into the hall. The women looked elegant in their fancy silky dresses, while the men looked dapper in their suits.

She was still looking at the guests when she heard three knocks on the door. She walked slowly to the door and opened it. There stood a maid. “Miss, your father requests for your presence in the hall,” she said to Salma.

She followed the maid towards the staircase. The maid gave her a weak smile and Salma glanced at her surroundings before taking a deep breath and descending the stairs. Reaching the bottom of the staircase, she let out a small sigh as she managed not to trip on her gown. Her father was waiting there, and he held out his hands for her to hold. He looked at her expectantly, and for the first time, he smiled at her. She knew it was a facade to make him look like a perfect father figure in the eyes of the society, but he couldn't fool her with his apparent charm. Her father led her to a group of sophisticated young men who were eager to meet her. Her encounter with them made her uncomfortable as she was not used to mingling around with people. He introduced her to groups after groups of people who seemed close to her father, but she didn't know any of them. She yearned for the night to come to an end. The party didn't stop until it was in the middle of the night.

Back in her room, she changed out of her dress into a pair of pants and a loose shirt. She took out a small backpack from under her bed. Quietly, she snuck out of her room to meet Rahman, her father's butler. She had promised to meet him in the garden, and she tiptoed slowly from her bedroom until she was outside of the house. Casting one last look at the interior of her house, she closed the door behind her. She walked to the garden that was located beside the house and there, Rahman was waiting for her. She advanced towards Rahman, and they left the house without words.

Her future might be difficult but for now, she wants to explore the world and experience things that she hadn't had the chance to do before. She might have to leave her dear mother and brothers, but the freedom that she would achieve later on was worth the pain of leaving them. The meaning of freedom to her is to be able to make decisions on her own regarding her future.

